

What is a pilot?

JR, 11/04/03

There's an old joke in production, "Everyone knows how to watch a pilot." Truth is, nobody knows how. When the video goes black for 10 seconds, because the producers haven't yet found the right shot for that position, somebody inevitably asks, "Is that ... planned?"

What are you supposed to see and hear in a pilot?

Some people think a pilot is a typical program in a proposed series.

Others think it is the best program in a proposed series.

It isn't the first show in a series. It isn't page one. Rather, the book has fallen open anywhere it wants.

A pilot must give the listener a sense of:

- Why are we doing this series? What is the reason, or if you want to be fancy, the *r'aison d'etre*?
- What is the premise? What is the starting point? What knowledge is assumed?
- What is the range of content that will be covered?
- Who are the key players?
- What is the treatment you intend? What is the point of view? Whose point of view is it?
- Where is the entire series going? Can I imagine listening to this every week and the story progressing, or will I become bored.
- A pilot should stretch the envelope, showing you the possible dimensions of the concept and the execution. It should tell you, viscerally, what is unique or at least unusual about this program. What do you get here that you don't get elsewhere?
- What are the extremes? From x to y, how far does this concept go, how far out will the implementers take the concept?

Are you supposed to like a pilot?

- Maybe. You probably shouldn't hate it, at least not all of it.
- You probably should find it intriguing, even enigmatic, seductive, curiosity-inspiring, puzzling.
- Mostly, you must want to return to it, to find out what happens to the people who are part of it.
- You cannot be blasé. You must care about the story.